



Minutes - King County Rural Forest Commission
Wednesday, July 18, 2007
Preston Community Center, Preston, Washington

Commissioners present: Julie Stangell, Jim Franzel, Ron Baum and Doug Schindler (arrived later).

Commissioners absent: Kevin Buckley, Leonard Guss, Alex Kamola, Lee Witter Kahn and Doug McClelland

Ex officio members absent: Marilyn Cope, Brandy Reed, Randy Sandin and Amy Grotta

Staff: Bill Eckel, Office of Rural and Resource Programs Manager; Joelyn Higgins, Department of Development and Environmental Services Rural Coordinator; Kathy Creahan, Farm and Forest Programs Manager; Kristi McClelland, Forester; Bill Loeber, Forester and Linda Vane, Liaison for the Rural Forest Commission

Guests: Brian Boyle, University of Washington College of Forest Resources; Ara Erickson, University of Washington College of Forest Resources; Chuck Vallette, Vashon Island forest landowner; Matt Rourke, International Forestry Consultants and DeeAnn Hansen, forest landowner

Meeting Summary

Action Items:

1. Joelyn Higgins, the DDES Rural Coordinator, will find out when the new wildfire safety best management practices manual will be available from DDES.
2. The RFC may send any additional Comprehensive Plan Update recommendations to Kathy Creahan before August 31.

Minutes:

Voting on minutes was postponed until the next meeting for lack of a quorum.

Julie Stangell called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m.

Report from the University of Washington and Northwest Environmental Forum on “The Future of Washington Forests”

Brian Boyle and Ara Erickson, University of Washington College of Forest Resources

Brian provided an overview of the Northwest Environmental Forum (Forum) and the series of studies called “The Future of Washington Forests.” He gave a history of the Northwest Environmental Forum, which began in 2003 with the idea that scientific expertise at the University of Washington could be put to use looking at natural resource management in the Northwest, identifying major issues confronting the state and putting facts at the core of the discussion instead of conflict. At the initial organizing meeting members of the forest

management community suggested that the Forum look at the conversion of forest to other land uses, according to Brian. From there the Forum organized a retreat at Alderbrook in 2004 which produced a series of recommendations. State Senator Ken Jacobsen was the only legislator at the meeting and he got the state to fund the 'Future of Washington Forests' studies. The final report was delivered to the Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) at the end of May 2007, said Brian.

At the third Forum in November 2006, an extensive report on the Washington forests research was delivered, said Brian. One of the major recommendations that came out of the third Forum had to do with Eastern Washington pine forests that are being damaged by pine beetles. Because of lack of mills and other infrastructure, there are no economic opportunities to move that wood and sell it productively. WDNR budgets had been cut way down so they could do nothing about it. Brian said that the legislature responded by allocating money to biofuels research and new studies on retention of forest land where it is threatened with conversion. On September 18, 2007, the Forum will convene to put together an overall set of strategies with organizations like land trusts, government agencies and WDNR to take a look at areas that are under threat of losing biodiversity or conversion. Brian said that they will work toward a strategy for how non-government organizations and local governments can be involved in identifying what the critical areas are that are likely to be converted from working forest to other uses.

According to Brian, the Forum has always been dedicated to maintaining the ability to manage forests. Hancock Timber for example, needs some economic incentives to stay in business and it is the same with family forests. Researchers have asked themselves, what does it take to show support for buying and managing land? WDNR is agreeing that over the next year they want to have the University of Washington develop a methodology for identifying acquisition criteria for \$70 million currently appropriated for land acquisition and perhaps beyond. At the same time, the university is to develop some retention strategies for private land owners to manage their land, said Brian. These could be things like carbon or biodiversity markets or regulatory incentives, continued Brian. These things have been discussed by the Forum before, but now the legislature is saying that since the money is appropriated they want to have some outside help with this. Boyle has been talking to organizations like EcoTrust and the Cascade Land Conservancy over the last few weeks and they are interested in being involved. The next Forum, to be held September 18, 2007, will be a combined deal where they will look at maps to determine elements of a potential methodology for acquisition and retention over the next year. [See NW Environmental Forum - <http://www.nwenvironmentalforum.org/>.]

Ara Erickson spoke about the findings of the studies, especially in regard to conversion of forest lands in eastern King County. Ara said that the research addressed questions like: What do we know about the patterns on the landscape? What are main patterns of forestland conversion? She said that in appropriating funds for the studies the state legislature called for an assessment of the trends and dynamics contributing to forestland conversion and wanted a review of the tools and potential policy levers that may influence the rate of encroachment and retention of forest cover. This is not a new subject said Ara, but there was a need to collect everything known in order to put it in front of a broad audience. The researchers reviewed existing

literature and looked for gaps in the data. Ara said that they came up with fewer answers than they had hoped to in this initial effort. A lot of questions came out of this process, both among researchers and members of the Forum.

Ara provided an overview of the five studies that have been completed: Timber Supply and Forest Structure; Competitive Position; Economic Contribution; Forest Land Conversion; and a DNR Granted Lands Study. [Read executive summaries of the studies at <http://www.nwenvironmentalforum.org/>.] Ara said that in doing the timber supply study, researchers found that the methodologies used in the past to analyze timber supply were not adequate. Lacking a good methodology, they focused on the factors that would change the timber supply, like land use. For example, they looked at the forest health crisis in eastern Washington and found that increased temperature and reduced precipitation levels over the last 100 years are strongly correlated with mountain pine beetle outbreaks. There is a serious problem with loss of timber supply in eastern Washington. The study revealed that on the west side of the Cascades the greatest concern is that we are losing forest cover to development, said Ara.

Ara said that researchers also looked at the economic contribution of forestry industries in the state as well as nationally and internationally. They showed that the state still has a significant number of jobs in forest industries, but milling for example, tends to be done in larger mills concentrated in the Puget Sound region. We have gained jobs in the large centralized mills, but have lost jobs in the small rural mills. But most of our harvesting is still being done in rural areas, so we are taking logs and sending them to the large mills, explained Ara. We are also seeing a significant concentration of mills in Idaho and northern Oregon and southern British Columbia, said Ara, but no mills in the central region of this state, two in Yakima, and only a few in the far east of the state. That feeds into our high tax rate for timberland and the high cost of running mills. Washington is mainly producing commodity exports that are going to other states for use in the housing industry, said Ara. She added that there is a lot of concern about what will happen if home construction declines. Washington State used to have a lot of specialty products that we exported, but that has decreased significantly, according to Ara.

Brian added that the issue of mills and taxes is really startling and the lack of competitiveness against production in the southeast, which is about 40% cheaper than Washington, and British Columbia, which is about 30% cheaper, is really quite startling. The Northwest, because of the decline of the export market, is a marginal producer in a lot of places and a niche producer in some areas, said Brian. He said that the report is quite extensive on this point and encouraged the commission to read it on the web site [<http://www.nwenvironmentalforum.org/>].

Julie said that one of the things that the RFC has struggled with is the loss of the small rural mills. It means that a small landowner has to put logs on a truck and ship them far farther than they ever had to in the past. If one only has a few acres or any kind of small forest, one does not have the quantity and cannot afford these high moving costs. Julie said that the RFC is having a difficult time getting their arms around that and asked Brian: how do they as a commission advising King County help? Brian referred to Sierra Pacific's proposal to locate a mill to Everett. There was public opposition to locating industrial facilities in their communities so the

company moved to Skagit County. That is a problem. Brian posed the question: how can you stay in business as a forest business if the public does not want you to cut the trees and they do not want you to process the wood if you do cut it? Also, he said, crowded roads make it complicated. Brian said that the best advice that the RFC can give the county is that the number of jobs and the gross business income that accrues to counties like King, Snohomish and Pierce from timber industries is significant. Brian said that in the light of “21st century industries” people often forget what forest industries can offer.

Bill Eckel asked how the state’s production relates to demand. Brian said the state produces more than it consumes, but that it also imports a lot of wood – the particulars are in one of the progress reports on the web site.

Kristi asked about the decline in harvest levels. Ara said that harvests on public land, particularly federal land, have declined but overall production does not reflect that decline because private land harvests has increased. The essence of timber supply study this time is to look at actual practices on the land and see what they are doing and see what landowners are projecting what they will do. It puts a tremendous onus on private landowners, including family forest landowners, who are on the pathway of conversion in the Puget Sound, said Ara. In researching biodiversity pathways issues, for example, the stated goal to achieve desired future conditions in riparian areas is at odds with restrictions placed on what landowners can do in riparian areas to achieve those very same desired future conditions. Ara said that those sorts of things are pointed out in the studies. For example, she said, a lot of times the landowners’ hands are tied and if one wants a productive industry one has to do some things that help make it make sense to stay in business.

Ron Baum asked for clarification on which landowners took up the slack for decline in national forest harvests. Ron said he looked at map showing harvest permits looks like those are on the edge of urban area. How many of those permits were clearing for development and how much was working forests. Ara said King County is very different than the rest of the state and their study looked at the whole state.

Ara discussed the university’s Land Conversion Study, explaining that the trend is urbanization of resource lands as population increases. She said that the study showed that in Washington State there are two main groups of landowners: the industrial forest lands and small non-industrial forest landowners. Both groups are frequently affected by issues such as: conflict at urban/rural interface over issues like logging trucks coming through, changing markets and uncertainty in regulatory environments. Large industrial landowners have accountability to shareholders, etc. Small forest landowners have a lot of other issues like aging landowners, disinterested younger generation, high estate taxes and retirement needs, according to Ara.

Ara said that the study conducted interviews and surveys to collect data. They tried to get at what is going on in the landscape and see what areas are at risk for conversion. The research showed the that for the most part industrial forest land owners are not converting and building a lot of condos themselves but are selling smaller parcels to other landowners, who in the future are moving into urban land use. This is the first time researchers have really been able to see the

flow of land use from industrial to small forest parcels to other land uses such as residential, hobby farms, woodland and pasture.

The researchers did further analysis using LandSat imagery and Class IV General Forest Practice applications and parcel information for 1996-2004 in King County to see how much forest was really getting converted and what it was being converted to. Ara said that the study asked: what is the real pattern of forest land use change: how much is converted, fragmented, developed, cleared for houses, working forests? The study showed that approximately 6,400 new parcels were created in unincorporated KC between 1996 and 2004, and 70% of these were in areas that saw conversion of land use from forestry. About 23% were in areas that were already in other land uses. An analysis of permits filed in these areas led the researchers to conclude that there is a large potential to see many more building permit applications in the next ten years in the areas that have been parcelized, but not developed. From the landscape perspective, it does not appear that much has changed, said Ara, but if the rate of development follows the rate of parcelization as it has in the past, we can expect a lot of conversions.

Kristi commented that the parcelization and flow from industrial forest to small non-industrial forest to homeowners is correct and it is set to explode. She said we have not seen the development yet because people often hold onto the land for harvest. Her observation was that homeowners are slow to move in for two reasons: the landowners are selling only a few lots at a time and the developments are slow to develop. Once development is set in motion, we see large areas developed all at once, like the Tolt River Highlands, which was the beginning, said Kristi. It is happening all over the state. Adding to the problem is that new forest landowners have no idea about forest management, she said.

Kathy commented that researchers should take into account land within the Urban Growth Area (UGA) that is planned for development, even though it is currently forested. For example, she said, the area around Black Diamond has thousands of acres in the UGA that will convert under the plan and only looks like forest for now – these lands are not what the County is concerned about or directing its efforts toward. One will see parcelization in the rural area, but not as much as one sees within the UGA. If one looks at the Forest Production District you won't see much parcelization, added Kathy.

Doug Schindler said that this report demonstrates what we have observed. He asked Brian about progress in terms of legislature and concern of forestry overall and where we are at. Brian said effect on legislature has been significant. First, they provided a million dollars for research and next steps in figuring out how to integrate the research into what people are seeing. Brian said that the legislature is interested in knowing what the hard facts are in terms of forest conversion and there is a lot of interest in the change in forest ownership – not so much the large companies like Hancock that are staying, but the more recent departures of companies like Weyerhaeuser. He said there is also an appropriation for WDNR for forestland retention and some interest in repositioning WDNR holdings, perhaps through land exchanges to create buffers. The governor's Climate Initiative has moved a whole lot of task forces, including one on forests, said Brian. What we are seeing is at the policy level the legislature is seeing some valid research that they initiated and they want to put it in action, said Brian. So often research takes place in a

vacuum, he said, the Forum is a core group that says this research is important and they want to work on policy with legislature. He sees that the legislature is really concerned about the forest industry and about forests. Brian said the RFC is in a position to call the County Council and Executive's attention to the data.

Bill Eckel said that he would like to know more about the study to prioritize acquisitions that the University of Washington is doing with non-government organizations. Bill said that the County has agreements with Cascade Land Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land (TPL) to coordinate acquisition strategies (including by outright purchase and by easements). The County hired TPL to help create a computer-based acquisition tool called Greenprint, he explained. In addition, the County has a Parks levy on the ballot that could generate money for land acquisition money and they have a Transfer of Development Rights program. Bill said that he would like to know what research says. Brian said that the topic is in flux. It will be at the center of the Forum in September, where they seek to create an integrated effort that will include land acquisition by local government and non-government organizations. The legislature has said that biodiversity is one of the goals of the Forum, so part of the discussion will be to define biodiversity goals. The September Forum will be only a one day meeting to help the university to get a research concept and buyoff on the concept from the Forum. In a year or two the university will come up with an analytic framework for what could be done and what criteria should be for acquisition and retention, said Brian. In the fall of 2008, they plan to come back to another Forum to create a strategy and Brian said that he hopes that it would include a set of economic incentives for landowners.

Doug Schindler said the owner of our largest forest lands, the USDA Forest Service, is confronting forest health issues and that the County should be looking at what needed to assure some management to address forest health. Brian agreed that the Forest Service needs allies in this. Doug S said we will all end up paying if we do not help them.

Brian said that this kind of interchange is really helpful and would like to continue the exchange. Gordon Bradley will be the lead investigator in the land conversion study. Brian said the final report will be available online at the end of July. Doug S said that it would be very useful to be able to cite the findings of the reports. Ron suggested that the reports use visual imagery to illustrate the main findings of the report, for example to let people see what it would look like fifty years from now if the trees are lost. Ara and Brian said that there are presentations on streaming video online. Brian said that as the problems are complex, it is challenging to figure out how to depict it in a simple forceful way. He said it might be useful to get ideas from people who are experienced in visual communications and he will give it consideration since scientists are not usually adept at that kind of communication.

Read the 2007 report submitted to state legislature:

<http://www.dnr.wa.gov/htdocs/agency/wffstudy/fwfffinalreport.html>.

Read the *The Future of Washington's Forest and Forestry Industries Study, Final Report*, July 2007: <http://www.nwenvironmentalforum.org/>

King County Comprehensive Plan Update and Ordinance changes

Kathy Creahan, Farm and Forest Programs Manager

Kathy handed out a proposed code amendment that will either be incorporated into the County's Comprehensive Plan update or adopted into code separately by the County Council. Kathy wanted to know if the RFC sees any issues with the proposed change. The new text, which will replace an outdated section, reads: "The forest management plan shall incorporate a fire protection element that shall include fire safety best management practices as developed by the department." Kathy explained that currently people must submit a forest management plan in order to get a permit to build a residence in the Forest Production District (FPD). The changed language would direct landowners to include steps to reduce forest fire risk in their forest management plans.

Doug Schindler asked about the level of wildfire protection that is required in the plans. Kristi explained that the County drafted a fire safety best management practices (BMPs) manual that will provide guidance, but the manual has not yet been finalized by the Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES). Joelyn Higgins, the DDES Rural Coordinator, said she would find out when the manual will be available.

There was discussion of the purpose of forest management plans, which are required for those building homes in the FPD. These are optional in the Rural Forest Focus Areas (RFFA) and other parts of the county unless used for certain types of regulatory or tax relief. Kathy said that the primary land use in the FPD is forestry and part of the reason that new residents must write a forest plan is to ensure that they understand the landscape that they are part of.

Doug S. proposed that in addition to the optional forest plan, that new residents in the RFFAs be provided some education or outreach regarding the wildfire safety BMPs. He asked if there is not something that can be done to reach them. Doug S. asked the group if they felt that the RFC should look at the RFFAs and Comprehensive Plan to see if additional education or outreach are needed. Julie said questions regarding the RFFA could put on the next meeting agenda.

Kathy provided an overview the incorporation of RFC recommendations into Chapter 3 of the Comprehensive Plan update. There were a few additional recommendations. Julie asked that a sentence from the minutes of the last RFC meeting be included in the Comprehensive Plan: "King County encourages active forest management as a means of reducing conversion of forestland to other uses, to improve forest health, sustain rural economic activities and to reduce risks from wildfire."

Doug Schindler noted that "King County's Natural Resource Lands" sounds like land owned by the county and suggested changing the wording to "natural resource lands in King County." Julie said that the section on biosolids applications sounded fine. Doug S said that in light of the high level of concern with forest fire threat, a strong fire safety policy statement is needed. Julie added that language that would support the Forest Services desire to manage forest and reduce fire load would also be valuable. Doug S concurred and said that fire from public lands could

pose a danger to homes near public lands. Doug added that if a major forest fire should be of broad concern because a major forest fire could have a serious impact on salmon habitat.

Kathy said the public review draft of the Comprehensive Plan update will include changes from staff in sections other than the Forestry Program that could be relevant to forestry. She said that the commissioners will be asked to give input on the public review draft.

Report on Farm and Forest Field Trips

Julie Stangell, RFC Chair

Julie, Matt, DeeAnn and Ron participated in the Snoqualmie Valley Forest and Farm Field Trips. The tours brought policy makers from the public and private sectors to working farms and forests to learn about issues from the landowners' perspectives. Julie said that as a forester, it was very exciting to make contact with folks who are farming here in the county, many of whom are organic farmers. She said the field trips helped her to better understand the common issues we have in keeping forestry and farming in the county. Common issues that came to light were development pressures and lack of infrastructure, said Julie.

Ron Baum said in farming they have a crop every year, whereas in forestry there is a long period between harvests. This creates a disconnect with consumers for forestry, unlike the close relationship that farmers can develop with their customers. He sees that agriculture is getting some public support because the public has some connection with the farmers. In the case of forestry, it is different.

DeeAnn said that she realized that people living on small parcels like River Bend do not realize the value that forests have for them. It is not just clean air, it is clean water and habitat. DeeAnn said that a lot of times people don't realize the importance of forests until there is a major event like a fish kill. Julie asked how we get folks to understand that value. DeeAnn said that even for her as an experienced tree farmer it was useful to take the County's forest stewardship class.

Julie said she was disturbed that many of the agricultural community were so anxious to keep the Snoqualmie from flooding and were talking about dredging and damming the river. In contrast, the forest industry would not even think of such measures, so that was a disconnect, said Julie. Ron said that from the agricultural perspective agricultural land is "developed" and modifications have been made to the land to allow farming. Ron said the group saw a small farm that has been flooded out so many times it is possible that they cannot continue to farm.

Julie said that the field trips were very successful and she is very glad that the RFC partnered with the Agricultural Commission to sponsor the tours.

Staff Reports

July 23 Town Hall Meeting in Maple Valley– Rural Round Table

The commissioners discussed whether the RFC should make a statement at the upcoming Rural Round Table regarding forestry issues. None of the commissions would be available to attend the meeting. The Forestry Program staff will be there to answer any forest-related questions.

A proposed ordinance to establish two new nonvoting ex officio seats on the RFC

Linda handed out a copy of the transmittal letter related to an ordinance to establish a new ex officio seat for the Forest Service and to correct the characterization of the WSU Extension ex officio seat. Linda said that the County Executive has transmitted the ordinance to the Council for consideration.

King County forest management update.

Bill Loeber said that timber harvest on Taylor Mountain has started. The County has advertised for a harvest on Ring Hill and for a small thinning on Island Center Forest on Vashon Island.

Suggestions for future agendas

1. Report back on the status of fire protection BMP manual.
2. Look at the Comprehensive Plan determine if some new language related to education or outreach to rural landowners or in the Rural Forest Focus Areas is needed.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Next meeting

The next regularly scheduled meeting is Wednesday, September 19, 2007, in Preston.

Staff Liaison:

Linda Vane, Forestry Program

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